

“Understanding Family Violence”  
Luncheon Address to the Uniformed Services  
Academy of Family Physicians  
Arlington, VA  
April 26, 1983

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The honored guests at this meeting were Lieutenant General Bernard Mittenmeyer, Surgeon General of the Army; Vice Admiral J. William Cox, Surgeon General of the Navy; and Lieutenant General Max B. Bralliar, Surgeon General of the Air Force. To this particular audience, I started with warm, congratulatory remarks about primary care, the heart of which is family practice and the interest of the Public Health Service therein. I then segued into what I called the difficult ugly topic, the one we simply have to confront and that is violence in the homes of America.

I began by defining supposedly well-understood terms like parent, sibling, child, and family, which led to the concept of multi generational instances of family violence. I also used this opportunity to point out the differences in the definition of family from “a combination of people, with a bond that requires each one to love and care for the other” to a family with a combination of two or more people who have themselves, accepted a bond that allows personal contact or direct access. In other words, they define the relationship through which they get at each other.

I then went on to talk about physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, and material or financial violence and referred to the 1972 Surgeon General’s Scientific Advisory Committee on television and social behavior, which published a now famous report called, “Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence”.

Dr. Jessie Steinfeld was Surgeon General at that time and deserves to be remembered for his leadership, which has reared its head many times since and would continue to be an ongoing theme with me during my eight year tenure as Surgeon General.

I mentioned the influence of Surgeon General, Julius Richmond in 1979, in asking the National Institute of Mental Health to take a critical look at the volume of research that had appeared since the 1972 report. I also relied heavily on the findings of Dr. David Pearl, Chief of the Behavioral Sciences Research Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health, whose findings were published in 1982 in a two-volume report entitled, “Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications in the Eighties”. I blasted the television networks, especially ABC calling their published work an embarrassment to the Social Science Research Community, as well as to the media.

It was a lecture like this given later in my tenure, which led to my involvement with the networks and to some progress being made with a coalition of networks to address the question of violence. Indeed, there was a representative of the then three major networks, who had an office in the office of the Surgeon General for a period of two years at the height of my interest in this subject.

I closed this lecture with the interesting observation that, "In the course of normal practice, most physicians do not have the opportunity of actually saving a life, but in this particular arena, the life-saving opportunities are there."

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Child

Crime & violence in the media

Family medicine

Family violence

Financial violence

Parent

Physical violence

Primary care

Psychological violence

Sexual violence

Sibling

Television and violence

Television network's shortcoming

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American Broadcasting Company

M.A.S.H

William Hughes

National Institute of Mental Health

David Pearl

Julius Richmond

Television & Behavior: Ten Years of  
Scientific Progress & Implications  
for the eighties"